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SUBJECT: CODEL TAUSCHER AUGUST 26 MEETINGS WITH SENIOR
IRAQI LEADERS

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Congresswoman Tauscher and accompanying CODEL members/staff met separately during their August 25-26 visit to Baghdad with Kurdish Regional President Barzani, Vice President Abdulmehdi, and National Security Advisor Al Rubaie. In each meeting, Representatives Tauscher (D-CA), Moran (D-VA), and Porter (R-NV) pressed for details on the status of Iraq's leadership talks, expectations for political progress, and the future of U.S. engagement with Iraq. Barzani assured Kurdish commitment to the national constitution and principles of national unity and political reconciliation, but directed blame toward Sunnis and Shia for continued insurrection. Barzani lauded Kurdistan's progress and stability and clarified his view on the issue of a national flag. Kurds should receive "between 25-30 percent" of national oil revenues based on current demographics. Vice President Abdulmehdi highlighted Iraqi achievements in the economic and political spheres, counseling U.S. patience in light of the ongoing war on terror. He warned against a precipitate U.S. withdrawal, arguing this would embolden terrorists and eventually bring the U.S. back to Iraq. Rubaie told the CODEL that the GOI remains in its infancy, calling for American patience with Iraq's nation building experiment. Rubaie (as did Abdulmehdi) welcomed Rep. Tauscher's call for a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and predicted that internal debate on the topic would commence next month. End summary.

¶2. (U) Joining Representatives Tauscher, Moran, and Porter were Armed Services Committee staff members Michael Casey and Stephanie Sanok, along with Embassy Legislative Affairs Officer and Political Officer (notetaker).

Kurdistan President Barzani Lauds Achievements

¶3. (SBU) During their 50-minute August 26 meeting at the residential compound of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Kurdish Regional President Masoud Barzani thanked the U.S. for its assistance in liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein. Noting the complexity of the Iraq conflict, Barzani warned that the war on terror in Iraq remained incomplete, hampered by continuing sectarian fratricide. Failing to defeat terror in Iraq, he cautioned, would threaten peace and stability in the region, and far beyond. Acknowledging domestic responsibility for resolution of Iraq's political troubles, Barzani said "if we're not serious about solving our own problems, you can't do it for us." The cost of freedom has been high, he noted, recounting that Saddam's regime destroyed 4,500 Kurdish villages, and murdered over 8

thousand Kurds - including 37 of Barzani's own family members, three of them brothers.

14. (SBU) The Kurds fought alongside the U.S. to liberate Iraq, Barzani asserted, and opted not to "seek revenge" on our previous oppressors. Instead, he said, the Kurds developed their economy and social institutions. Now, Iraq's Kurdish region is a haven from the Shia/Sunni feuding further south. Such feuding, he lamented, has "opened the door for interference by regional powers." Alluding to ongoing political talks among Iraq's five most senior political leaders (septel), Barzani cast blame toward the "other parties" for failure to assure more meaningful progress. We Kurds, he added, "won't go back on our commitments, but don't want to be burned by the fire caused by others." Barzani invited U.S. Congress Members to visit Kurdistan to witness the development and stability of the north.

15. (SBU) Asked by Rep. Moran about the dispensation of Iraqis moved by Saddam Hussein to Kurdistan and charges of ongoing "ethnic cleansing" in these areas, Barzani said the allegations were "untrue and unfounded," and pledged fealty to Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. When there is talk of "normalization" there, he continued, we talk of those who were brought there and are willing to go ("Shia, not Sunni - willing to go if compensated"). Kurdistan today is a refuge from the sectarian violence further south, he added. Asked what percent of national oil revenues should accrue to the Kurdish region, Barzani said "17-18 percent was not enough." If based upon an "accurate census," Kurdistan should receive "25-30 percent" of national oil revenues.

16. (SBU) Responding to a question on the respective flags of Iraq and the Kurdish region, Barzani said that the flag (one

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with three stars) currently flown in Baghdad violated Iraq's constitution. The stars, he said, based upon a 1986 law (Law 33), represented the principles of the now-banned Baath Party. Since Parliament refused, he said, to clarify for him the meaning of the three stars, "we will not fly it." Barzani closed with a historical overview, noting how "Turks, Arabs, and Persians all tried, but failed, to divide and annihilate us." Pointing to Kurdish commitment to the guarantees of autonomy in Iraq's constitution, he stated "our existence will not be denied."

VP Abdelmehdi Warns of Precipitate Withdrawal

17. (SBU) During the CODEL's 40-minute meeting with Deputy President Adil Abdelmehdi, Members admonished the Iraqi political leadership for limited progress on political reconciliation and its failure to assume more responsibility for Iraqi security. Abdelmehdi sought to direct attention to what he characterized as successes within the economic realm, cautioning that Iraq's political sphere required time and (U.S.) patience in which to mature. A precipitate USG withdraw would be considered a "childish" waste of resources and vision, and would be considered a victory for extremists and terrorists.

18. (SBU) Asked whether the Prime Minister could effectively lead the country, Abdelmehdi suggested that the PM's staff had failed to provide the "vision" that Maliki himself lacked. Still, Maliki retained the "confidence" of the Council of Representatives and would likely remain in power, at least for another month or so, he said. Abdelmehdi responded favorably to Rep. Tauscher's suggestion that a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) be negotiated in order to remove the problem of "occupation" by U.S. troops. He said the GOI had proposed such an agreement in 2003 to Ambassador Bremer, but the idea was rejected by then SecDef Rumsfeld.

¶9. (SBU) Rubaie opened by thanking the American people for their sacrifices for the people of Iraq. Rep. Tauscher stressed the importance for GOI leaders to achieve progress on the political front quickly. Responding to Rep. Porter's comment regarding strong American public sentiment for withdrawal from Iraq, Rubaie raised Anbar and Diyala Provinces, suggesting that Al Qaida in Iraq would likely reclaim control of those areas were U.S. troops to depart. Rep. Tauscher was pleased to hear from Rubaie that the GOI will begin discussions on terms of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) beginning in late September; he estimated that a bilateral agreement could be finalized "next year." To Rep. Moran's inquiry regarding Sunni/Shia ratio for detainees in Iraqi detention centers, Rubaie estimated an even split. Summing up his views on the status of Iraq's political process, Rubaie said that Iraqis are struggling to identify themselves after 35 years of tyranny and in the wake of the Samarra bombing and other acts of terrorism.

¶10. (U) CODEL Tauscher did not have the opportunity to clear on this message.
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